Hitching Your Trailer

Get hitched. So you can giddy up.
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Get hitched. So you can giddy up.

You’re proud of your rig, and you’re ready to get out on the road and use it. But first, there’s this crazy little thing called hitching. Since it’s vital to safe travel, hitching your RV to your tow vehicle isn’t something you can rush through – or you’ll end up at the auto shop.

SO, TO START WITH

Your hitch might require special instructions not included in this guide, so be sure to read your manufacturer’s instructions.
The first time you hitch, it's really best to get help from a professional. If you're getting your hitch professionally installed, ask for a personal lesson.

Consider videotaping the pro's process, and keep the instructions they give you so when it's time to hitch your own rig you can reference exactly what steps they took to get the job done.

Now, let's hook you up with some serious know-how.
From the get-go, you need to know that this process is unlike anything you've done before. You'll need to take your time and make sure you check and double-check your work.

Also, your hitch isn't just heavy; it's greasy. Getting the hitch on is a deceptively tricky maneuver. To protect you and your RV from potential harm, follow the 3 L's: Look, Lock, and Load.
THE 3 L’S OF HITCHING YOUR RV

Look: Are you really ready to go?

• Step out of the RV and look back at it. Is there anything in there you’ll need while you’re on the road? Don’t leave it in the RV. Triple check and move anything you’ll want to access to the tow vehicle.

• Check the area around the RV. Did you leave any gear on the ground? Do you have plenty of space to maneuver your tow vehicle onto the RV hitch?

• There’s only one thing you’ll want on the ground: your chocks. Be sure your chocks are firmly against the wheels to prevent any small movements from your RV during the hitching process. If at any point in the hitching process you feel the trailer move – even slightly – stop everything and check that the chocks are in place.

• Even if you’re an old pro, don’t get sloppy. You may think you know your hitching procedure, but keep your eyes open! Consider things that could affect clearance, such as new wheels, a different tow vehicle, even weather – and make a mental note to account for them.
Lock: Ready your rig.

• With highway speeds and potential road hazards, you need to be vigilant when preparing the RV. As such, you’ll want to close any windows, awnings, and vents. Roof vents are easy to accidentally leave open because they’re hard to see from the ground. So double check to verify all your roof vents have been securely closed; no one likes an accidental sunroof!

• There shouldn’t be anything left in the “on” position or loose inside or outside of the trailer. Turn everything off. This means shutting down all of the appliances and disconnecting utilities.

• Lock the door behind you. You don’t want the RV door to fly open while you’re driving!

Load: Fuel up, prepare yourself, and get the hitch in position.

• Give yourself plenty of time. This can be a long and sometimes frustrating process, so do yourself a favor and set aside some uninterrupted just-me-and-my-hitch time. Have a snack, use the restroom, and get any other distractions out of the way so you can stay focused during hitching.
• Stretch beforehand, and think smart while lifting and loading. The hitch is heavy, and a slip could result in a painful injury. You may be tempted to speed things along, but it’s just not worth the risk!

• Grab a friend who can help you back up your vehicle straight and true.

• Unlock the hitch itself and open the receiver latch.

• Using a jack, lift the front of the trailer so you have space to guide the ball onto the receiver. Apply some lubricant to the jack piston while it's open. Don’t overdo it and wipe off the excess, or it could slip on the jack blocks. Ouch!
4 steps for hitching with confidence.

**STEP 1: CONNECT YOUR HITCH WITH YOUR TOW VEHICLE.**

Handling your hitch with both hands, carefully lift it into position on the receiver. Never try to force a hitch onto a receiver; the action should be easy and smooth. Next, secure your hitch with your linch pin. This step may be a quick one, but it’s crucial, so don’t forget the linch pin (aka lynch pin, cotter pin, hitch pin)! Lock it into place if it has a lock.
STEP 2: LINK UP YOUR TRAILER AND TOW VEHICLE.

This step will be easiest in an open parking area with level ground. It’s time to put that fancy backup camera to good use!

If you don’t have a backup camera, get a friend to help you back up in line with the trailer. This will really save your legs from getting in and out of your vehicle as you make tiny adjustments. Wouldn’t you rather save that energy for a hike when you arrive at your destination?

TOGO TIP — If your RV is large, it will benefit you and your hitching partner to get on the phone or walkie-talkies so you can easily hear verbal instructions.

Great, you’re aligned! The hardest part is over. Go ahead and put your vehicle in park, engage your emergency brake, and turn off your engine.
STEP 3: HITCH THE OPEN RECEIVER.

If you have sway bars or weight-distribution bars, this is the time to connect them. If you have a specialized hitch, please refer to your manufacturer’s guide. Otherwise, note that these types of hitches require additional steps.

In brief, you’ll need to attach the weight distribution spring bars to the hitch head, saddle it to the lowered snap-up bracket, and attach the chain link onto the hook – while remembering to clip them closed.

It’s time to match up your trailer hitch to the receiver. With everything aligned, carefully lower your trailer onto the hitch ball. You’ll need to lower it only as much as necessary to close the latch. Once you know for certain it’s in the right place, lower it down so the full weight is on the hitch ball. Then, lock the receiver latch with the hitch ball in place. The lock here is just as important as the linch pin.
STEP 4: LOAD UP ON SAFETY GEAR.

Now that your trailer hitch has met its match, you can add safety gear like brake cables, safety chains, a breakaway cable, and an emergency brake release.

Don’t get your chains in a twist.

If you've got safety chains, cross them like an X, but don’t twist them. These chains hook between either side of your hitch and onto your tow vehicle. They're an added measure to keep your trailer from separating from your vehicle, and they're essential. They should be long enough to allow for sharp turns, but if you feel the need to twist them, they're too long. Twisted chains can become brittle and snap, making them useless.
The final countdown.

Nearly there, friend. Here are the final items to check off before you set your sights on that first campsite.

- Remove the wheel chocks.
- Look again for loose items, unlocked windows or doors.
- Check that your brake lights, headlights, and turn signals are functional.
- Check your brakes themselves. There should be an indicator light on the brake controller.
- Hop in the driver’s seat and make sure you have visibility in your mirrors.

Give your traveling companion a hearty high five. Not only is your RV safely hitched, you’re also quite the looker!
CONCLUSION

All hitched up. With places to go.

Well done, road warrior. You looked, locked, and loaded. Then you connected your hitch to your towing vehicle, aligned your vehicles, locked up your hitch, and added on the safety gear. Now you’re ready for all the adventures that await you.

We hope you’ve found this e-book helpful. If so, please share it with your friends in high (and low) places. And be sure to tell them Togo hooked you up with all the hitching know-how you could handle!
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